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SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE  
Department of Microbiology  
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SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94143

September 11, 1985

Dr. Dani P. Bolognesi  
Department of Surgery  
Duke University Medical Center  
Durham, NC 27710

Dear Dani:

Thanks for your letter of September 9. I would not have called Bob's contributions to our conversation at Bar Harbor a "tirade." For the most part, I found him to be sympathetically open, if troubled, and I was gratified that he was willing to provide both insight into his views and potential accommodation on the issue of nomenclature.

The pieces of paper you sent to me are not particularly helpful; naturally I have been exposed, like everyone else (perhaps more so), to these attacks and counter-attacks, and I certainly recognize that they cause anxiety. However, they do not contribute anything of substance to the abstract issue that confronts us, only to the political and psychological aspects of reaching a consensus.

What was particularly new to me at Bar Harbor was the revelation that Bob feels that he might be perceived as acknowledging the veracity of such accusations by agreeing to call the AIDS virus something other than HTLV-III. As I told him, this seems misguided to me; on the contrary, I have believed from the outset that his stature would be appreciably enhanced by his leading the adoption of a more sensible name, particularly in the large community that lacks fierce loyalties in the disputes over priority.

As you no doubt realize, I strongly disagree with your statement that "a better name...does not exist." For many reasons that have been reiterated in our committee's correspondence, HTLV-III seems to me to be a highly inappropriate name for this virus, and the majority of the group favors something else. Naturally we want that something else to be acceptable to the major workers in the field, and I am hopeful of achieving some sort of consensus with Bob's help.

With best regards,

Harold E. Varmus, M.D.  
American Cancer Society  
Professor of Molecular Virology

HEV/jm